



NEWS RELEASE

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CONTACT:

Miles Bristow, Office of Public Affairs
(916) 574-8165

Department of Consumer Affairs Highlights Mediation Efforts That Help Customers and Businesses Agree on Fair Deal

'Mediation Week' Features Program That Returned Nearly \$2 Million to Consumers Last Year

SACRAMENTO – Consumers help drive a California economy that ranks as the world's sixth largest. But what can a consumer do if a good deal goes bad? For thousands of California consumers, the answer is the Department of Consumer Affairs' Complaint Mediation Program or similar programs statewide.

To showcase the California Department of Consumer Affairs (DCA) Complaint Mediation Program and other complaint resolution programs, Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger has designated March 19-25 as "California Mediation Week." DCA is highlighting Mediation Week with local outreach events throughout the state.

Maybe a repair shop didn't fix a customer's TV or computer correctly. Perhaps their last visit for vehicle service didn't have the results they expected, or they didn't receive every piece of upholstered furniture they ordered. In cases like these, the California Department of Consumer Affairs' Complaint Mediation Program tries to help consumers and businesses resolve their disagreement.

"When disagreements arise, consumers and businesses need to find middle ground and work out a resolution to the issue that works for both sides. Mediation programs provide the forum and trained staff to try and make this happen," said Consumer Affairs Director Charlene Zettel.

DCA's Complaint Mediation Program processes all customer complaints filed against California businesses that are regulated by the following DCA bureaus: Automotive Repair, Cemetery and Funeral, Electronic and Appliance Repair, Home Furnishings and Thermal Insulation, Hearing Aid Dispensers, and Security and Investigative Services.

The program, operating out of four regional offices statewide, reviews more than 15,000 complaints a year. Mediators took on about 8,000 of these cases last fiscal year, resulting in refunds and adjustments for consumers totaling more than \$1.8 million. The remaining 7,000 cases were referred for formal investigation. The program has netted approximately \$21 million for consumers during the past decade.

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“Mediation emphasizes resolution rather than confrontation, and it helps consumers and businesses to maintain good relationships,” said Zettel. “Mediators can propose terms to settle disputes, but they can’t dictate settlement terms.”

In addition to its own program, DCA oversees mediation programs in 31 California counties.

Mediation Week Events

Department of Consumer Affairs Complaint Mediation Program staff will make presentations or staff tables or booths at several locations in Northern and Southern California during Mediation Week, where they will be available to answer questions, receive complaints, explain services, and provide referrals to other agencies as needed. A variety of consumer publications will be available. Bilingual staff will also be available to assist Spanish-speaking consumers at some events.

Following is a schedule of Mediation Week events:

Northern California			
March 17-19	Sonoma County Home & Garden Show	Sonoma County Fairgrounds, Santa Rosa	Fri. 1-8 p.m. Sat. 10 a.m. - 8 p.m. Sun. 10 a.m. - 6 p.m.
March 18	Murphys Irish Days	Murphys	10 a.m. - 5 p.m.
March 20	Bayfair Mall	San Leandro	10 a.m. - 3 p.m.
March 20-21	Arden Fair Mall	Sacramento	10 a.m. - 5 p.m.
March 24	San Pablo Senior Center	San Pablo	10:50 - 11:30 a.m.
March 24-25	Sunrise Mall	Citrus Heights	10 a.m. - 5 p.m.
Southern California			
March 21	San Fernando Kiwanis Club	San Fernando	11:30 a.m. - 1:30 p.m.
March 22	Montebello Town Center Mall	Montebello	10 a.m. - 4 p.m.
March 22	Norwalk Senior Center Senior Scam Stopper Panel Discussion	Norwalk	2:30 - 4 p.m.
March 22-23	Montclair Plaza Mall	Montclair Plaza Mall, Montclair	9:30 a.m. - 4 p.m.
March 23	Washington Mutual Bank	Glendora	9 a.m. - 4 p.m.

For more information, consumers can visit the Department of Consumer Affairs online at www.consumer.ca.gov or call DCA’s toll-free assistance hotline at (800) 952-5210.

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